

February 19th, 2023

Last Sunday after Epiphany, Year A; Transfiguration

Exodus 24: 12-18

Psalm 99

Matthew 17: 1-9

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is our last Sunday in this short season of Epiphany, this moment after the full seasons of Advent and Christmas end and before we begin the solemn season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, as we walk with Jesus to Jerusalem.

We end Epiphany, the season of light, the season of learning again God with us, God's son born among us, living a lifetime, walking our valleys and mountains ahead of us, we end this season with a bang, with lots of light and sugar and butter on Shrove Tuesday, or as the French well call it, Mardi Gras translated as Fat Tuesday.

And we end the Sundays of Epiphany today with a bang too, a miraculous scene, drenched in light.

We join Jesus as he slips away from the larger group traveling to Jerusalem, and he takes his closest friends with him, up a high mountain. And there Jesus is transfigured. Not a word we use daily, that means:

A complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state.

Drenched in dazzling light, his face shining, and the prophets of old appearing with him, Jesus shows his dearest friends that hope and light are ahead, not only the cross, but even more, the resurrection.

Peter, James, and John will need this look ahead to give them courage to go through the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane and the darkness in themselves when they fall so short, when they fail, when panic overwhelms them.

The Transfiguration story appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke but only Matthew includes

the words of comfort that Jesus gives his friends, after God's voice echoes out of the clouds, and Peter, James, and John are terrified.

Jesus leans over to each of them, touches them with reassurance, and says:

"Get up and do not be afraid."

Jesus echoes that words we have been hearing for past months, those words that move us from fear to hope: do not be afraid.

The words that gave Mary the courage to bear the Christ child.

The words spoken to Joseph, to stop him from rejecting Mary, pregnant and not yet married to him.

We all need moments of transfiguration--encouragement, hope, do not be afraid, get up and go on—moments of glimpsing ahead, a peek at where God is calling us.

We need transfiguration in our own lives, and in our lives as Trinity, and in our lives as Whitechapel.

I have mentioned before that I come from a very small family. Only 9 cousins, 3 aunts, 3 uncles.

The uncle I was closest to was a step-uncle, my Aunt Dede's second husband. He was a lawyer and a judge, and since he had the same first name, Bill, as Aunt Dede's first husband, we called him Uncle Judge.

Uncle Judge was my last surviving uncle, and Tim and I were close to him, and delighted in conversations and visits with him. He had a dry wit, a keen interest in people, was an avid fan of baseball, and bicycled well into his late 80s. And he was a lifelong and devout Catholic.

When I entered the ordination process to become a priest, Uncle Judge was strikingly thrilled, what with his long dedication to a church that forbid the ordination of women.

But Uncle Judge was famous for thinking for himself, and he was good with the ordination of women and thrilled that this step-niece was entering the ordination process.

I was grateful for his interest and enthusiasm, but I was a bit shaken by his constant talk about my future.

Uncle Judge was famous for his phone calls, you would answer the phone, there would be brief preliminaries, and he would immediately dive into what topic was on his mind.

And during those 4 years I was in the ordination process, that was always the topic on his mind. And he would always say, WHEN you are ordained, not if. And he would always be speaking of my future, how ordination would affect my ministry in the schools, what was next for me.

I'd always remind him, Uncle, IF I am ordained, God willing.

But he would brush aside such doubting, and go on with his when, with questions and a vision for my call, that I could not even imagine yet.

Uncle Judge offered me transfiguration in those calls, moving aside my doubts, worries, and deep weariness with the ordination process, and offering me a light-filled glimpse ahead, and his faith that I would be ordained.

Uncle even found in his endless research on the internet, a lesser known Barbie doll, who's chosen career was not to be a fashion model, but to be an Episcopal priest, and he wanted so badly to buy it for me!

He would call and fill me in on his search; evidently the doll was a homemade project, but he was still looking for one for me.

He never found a "The Reverend Barbie", but again, his steadfast believe that I needed one, because I WAS going to be ordained, gave me a much needed push to go on.

One day he called me, as ordination grew closer and explained that the family of an ordinand was called on to give the new priest a chalice and paten, and that he would see to this gift.

I, of course, had never heard of this tradition, as it was a Catholic practice, and I was not sure how to respond. But as with all things ordination, Uncle Judge plowed forward and one day, and yes, confidently months before my ordination, a box arrived.

In the box was a note saying simply:

"As often as you do this, do it in memory of me".

Four months later I was ordained. Uncle Judge was not well enough to travel to the service, but he called later for all the details. And to ask more questions, all looking to the future.

God calls us forward, showing us glimpses of transfiguration to keep our hearts and spirits lifted. Whether transfiguration comes on a mountain top or with a phone call, we are all, as individuals and as the church, called into the future, the hope of what God has in store for us next, God's new thing, always reassuring us, do not be afraid.

Amen.